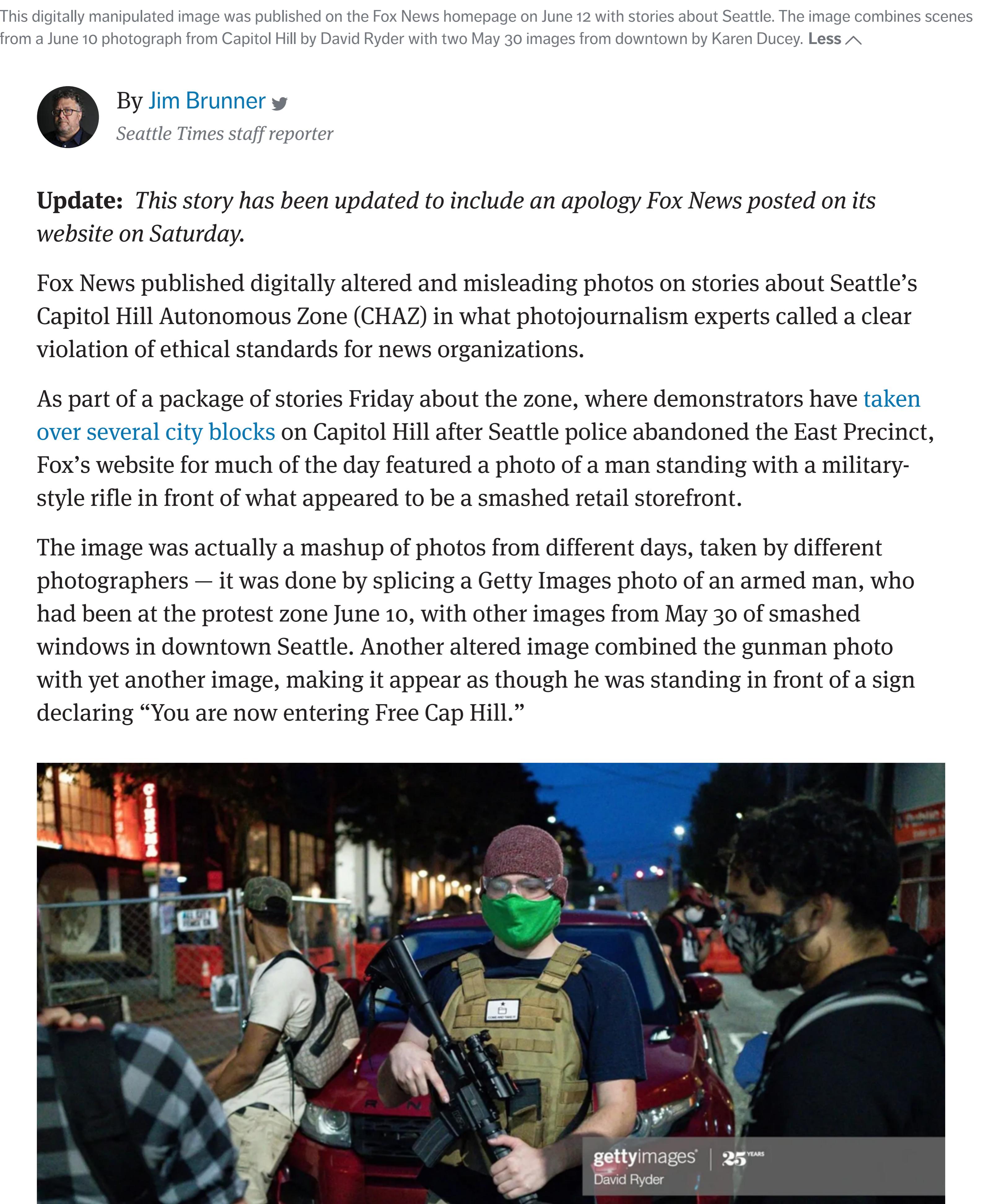


Fox News runs digitally altered images in coverage of Seattle's protests, Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone

June 12, 2020 at 8:06 pm | Updated June 14, 2020 at 9:06 pm

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This digitally manipulated image was published on the Fox News homepage on June 12 with stories about Seattle. The image combines scenes from a June 10 photograph from Capitol Hill by David Ryder with two May 30 images from downtown by Karen Ducey. [Less](#)



By **Jim Brunner**

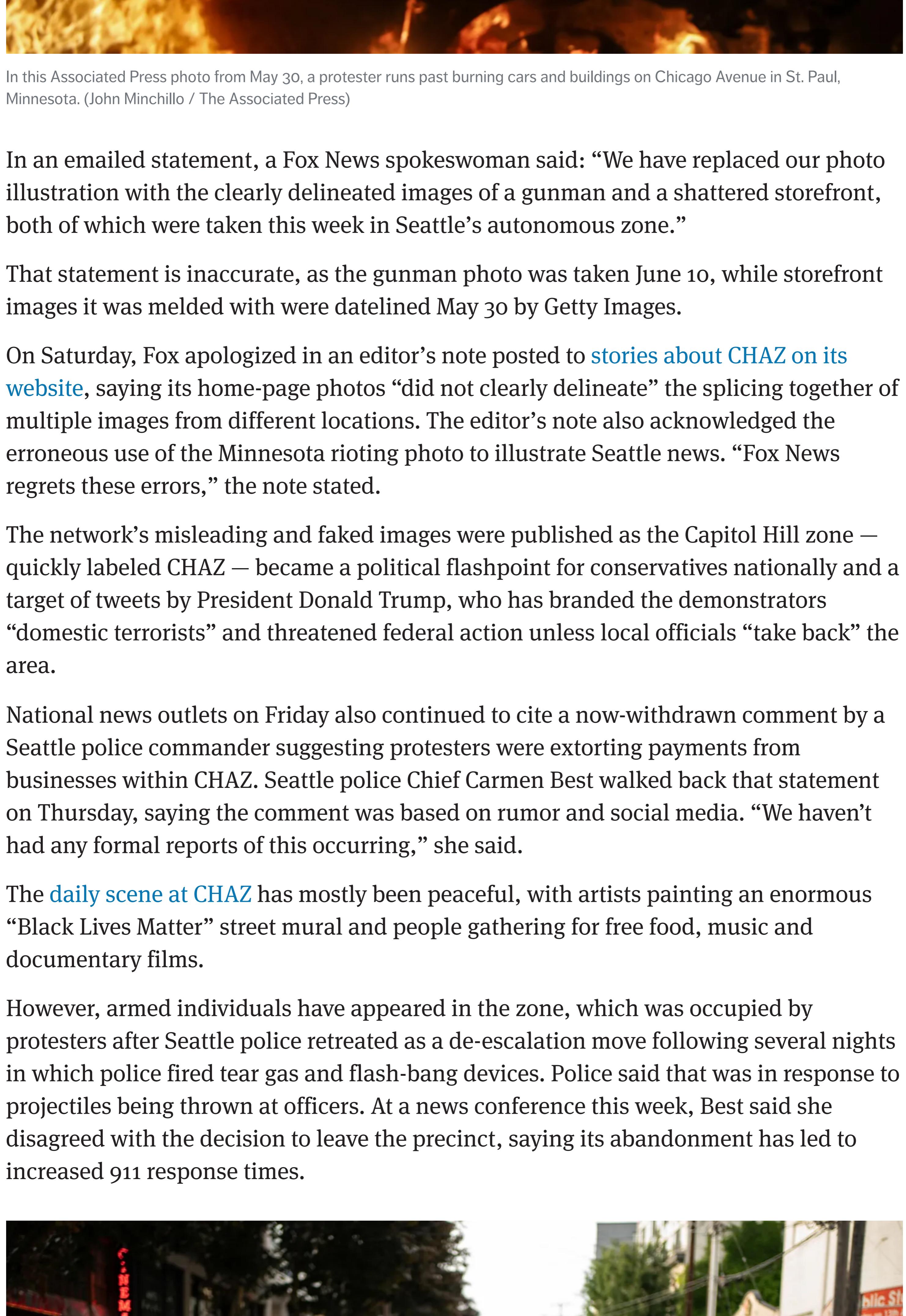
Seattle Times staff reporter

Update: This story has been updated to include an apology Fox News posted on its website on Saturday.

Fox News published digitally altered and misleading photos on stories about Seattle's Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ) in what photojournalism experts called a clear violation of ethical standards for news organizations.

As part of a package of stories Friday about the zone, where demonstrators have [taken over several city blocks](#) on Capitol Hill after Seattle police abandoned the East Precinct, Fox's website for much of the day featured a photo of a man standing with a military-style rifle in front of what appeared to be a smashed retail storefront.

The image was actually a mashup of photos from different days, taken by different photographers — it was done by splicing a Getty Images photo of an armed man, who had been at the protest zone June 10, with other images from May 30 of smashed windows in downtown Seattle. Another altered image combined the gunman photo with yet another image, making it appear as though he was standing in front of a sign declaring "You are now entering Free Cap Hill."



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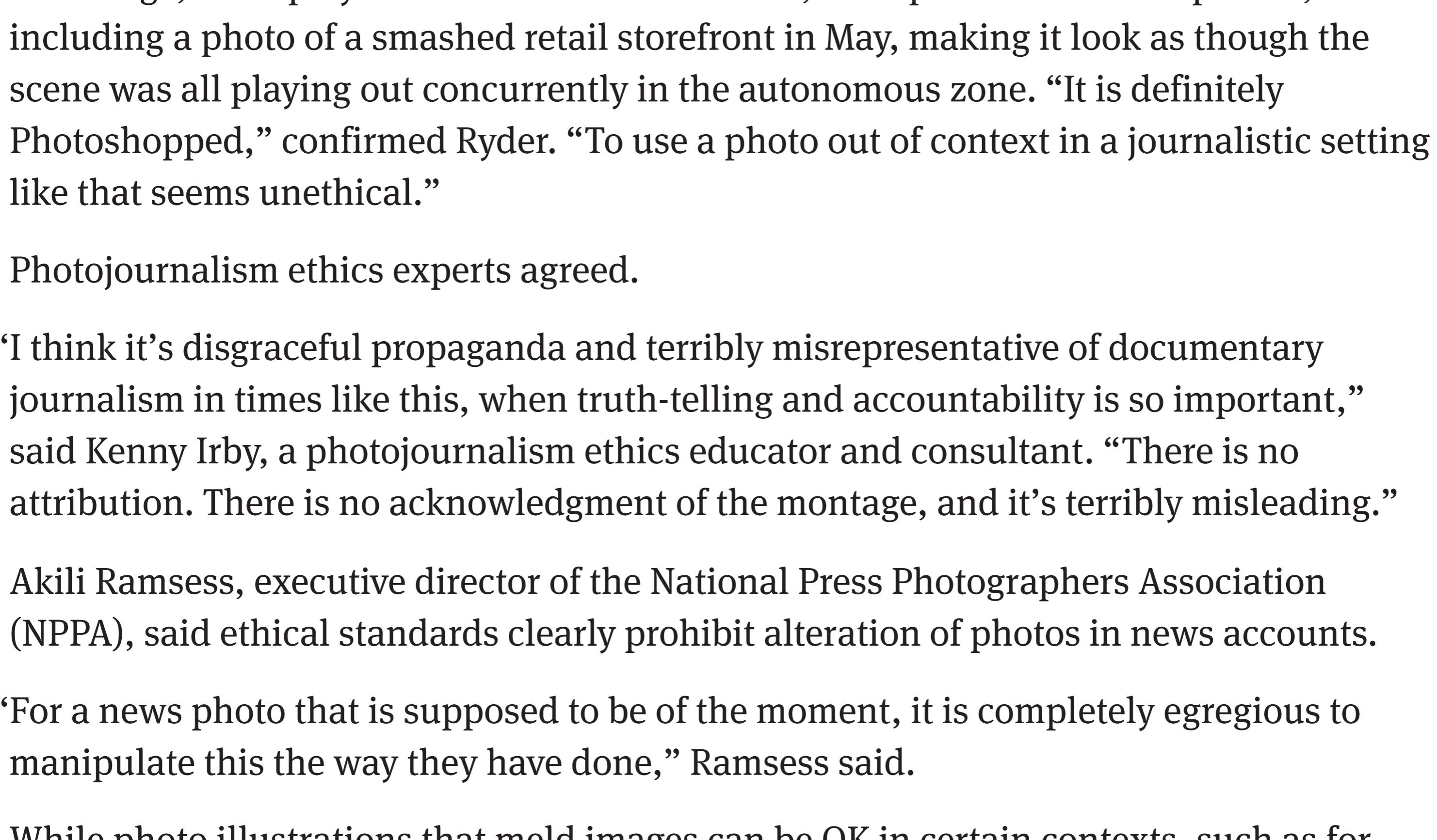
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The Fox News homepage on June 11 displayed an image from May 30 protests in St. Paul, Minnesota, to illustrate a story about Seattle's Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone.



In this Associated Press photo from May 30, a protester runs past burning cars and buildings on Chicago Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota. (John Minchillo / The Associated Press)

In an emailed statement, a Fox News spokeswoman said: "We have replaced our photo illustration with the clearly delineated images of a gunman and a shattered storefront, both of which were taken this week in Seattle's autonomous zone."

That statement is inaccurate, as the gunman photo was taken June 10, while storefront images it was melded with were datelined May 30 by Getty Images.

On Saturday, Fox apologized in an editor's note posted to [stories about CHAZ on its website](#), saying its home-page photos "did not clearly delineate" the splicing together of multiple images from different locations. The editor's note also acknowledged the erroneous use of the Minnesota rioting photo to illustrate Seattle news. "Fox News regrets these errors," the note stated.

The network's misleading and faked images were published as the Capitol Hill zone — quickly labeled CHAZ — became a political flashpoint for conservatives nationally and a target of tweets by President Donald Trump, who has branded the demonstrators "domestic terrorists" and threatened federal action unless local officials "take back" the area.

National news outlets on Friday also continued to cite a now-withdrawn comment by a Seattle police commander suggesting protesters were extorting payments from businesses within CHAZ. Seattle police Chief Carmen Best walked back that statement on Thursday, saying the comment was based on rumor and social media. "We haven't had any formal reports of this occurring," she said.

The daily scene at CHAZ has mostly been peaceful, with artists painting an enormous "Black Lives Matter" street mural and people gathering for free food, music and documentary films.

However, armed individuals have appeared in the zone, which was occupied by protesters after Seattle police retreated as a de-escalation move following several nights in which police fired tear gas and flash-bang devices. Police said that was in response to projectiles being thrown at officers. At a news conference this week, Best said she disagreed with the decision to leave the precinct, saying its abandonment has led to increased 911 response times.

ORIGINAL IMAGE: This June 10 image shows a sign on a barrier at the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ). It was used in the creation of digitally manipulated images published by Fox News. (Photo by David Ryder/Getty Images)

MANIPULATED IMAGE: This digitally manipulated image was published on the Fox News homepage on June 12 with stories about Seattle. The image combines scenes from two different June 10 photographs from Capitol Hill.

The June 10 photo of an unidentified man with a gun standing in front of a car in CHAZ was taken by Seattle freelance photographer David Ryder, who distributed the photo through Getty Images.

The image, as displayed on the Fox News website, was spliced with other photos, including a photo of a smashed retail storefront in May, making it look as though the scene was all playing out concurrently in the autonomous zone. "It is definitely Photoshopped," confirmed Ryder. "To use a photo out of context in a journalistic setting like that seems unethical."

Photojournalism ethics experts agreed.

"I think it's disgraceful propaganda and terribly misrepresentative of documentary journalism in times like this, when truth-telling and accountability is so important," said Kenny Irby, a photojournalism ethics educator and consultant. "There is no acknowledgment of the montage, and it's terribly misleading."

Akili Ramsess, executive director of the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA), said ethical standards clearly prohibit alteration of photos in news accounts.

"For a news photo that is supposed to be of the moment, it is completely egregious to manipulate this the way they have done," Ramsess said.

While photo illustrations that meld images can be OK in certain contexts, such as for features or opinion pieces, they need to be properly labeled, she said, adding that misleading mashups have no place in straight news coverage. The NPPA ethics code expressly forbids use of altered photos in news stories.

Fox News has "a responsibility to their public. It's one thing for their opinion hosts to state whatever opinion they have, but for their online news platform, they have to follow the ethical norms of any news organization," she said.

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